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“Biopolitical Bollywood: Sexual Violence as Cathartic Spectacle
in *Section 375* and *Article 15*”

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the representation of sexual violence in two recent mainstream Bollywood films, *Section 375* and *Article 15*, using Laura Mulvey's argument about the production of visual pleasure. Laura Mulvey states how the male gaze of the camera makes invisible, and produces as reality, the objectification of the woman and the identification of the audience with the male performer. This paper uses these findings to state how the male gaze is used to identify with the male protagonist in both films in order to create an identificatory politics. The films deploy a *pathos of familiarity*: both the familiar and the familial are used to create a sympathetic gaze towards the male protagonists. Further, the paper argues that the use of media and the 'regime of the visible' are used in both films in order to enable the production of a *biopolitical gaze* which shows how the state uses 'public penology' in rape trials (Bhattacharya 7). For example, the paper points to the films' use of techniques such as the depiction of the angry activist crowd or the fiery romanticized police officer in *Section 375* and *Article 15*, respectively. These devices are used to disrupt and affectively regulate the viewers' emotions towards a biopolitical logic of the goodness of state machinery. The paper concludes that it is a male gaze that affectively controls its viewers and aligns them with statist ends. The films, the paper argues, also act to perpetuate 'rape myths': fictions with a repetitive force behind them that seem to pass as truth in discourse.

KEYWORDS: biopower, biopolitics, Laura Mulvey, *Article 15*, *Section 375*, #MeToo, sexual violence, public penology, law, feminism, caste

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2019 witnessed the release of two mainstream Hindi films centering around different aspects of the law. *Section 375: Marzi Ya Zabardasti* and *Article 15*. Both films took their titles and central themes from the Constitution of India. The former deals with section 375 of the Indian Penal Code from which derive the rape laws of the country. The latter deals with article 15 of the constitution which lays down a fundamental right to equality and freedom from discrimination. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The similarity in the two films extends to their narrative origins in true events that have been in circulation in the media.

There are several media events and social issues that lay the foundation of the narrative of these two films. The former film is understood to have its basis in the Shiney Ahuja case: a rape charge on a Bollywood celebrity Shiney Ahuja for raping his young domestic help (Sarkar). The actor was charged and processed with seven years of jail by a sessions court before being out on bail on appeal to the Bombay High Court. The 2009 rape case led to a scandalous rumor mill circulating gossip on the one hand, and outrage from feminist women's rights groups for the impunity enjoyed by celebrities for serious crimes on the other hand.

The future script writer of *Section 375*, Manish Gupta, is reported to have met at that time the District Commissioner of Police who confirmed that "that intercourse between Shiney and the maid was confirmed, but they were not sure if it was consensual or rape" (Sarkar np). The notion that forensic evidence is not enough to prove rape and that the rape victim should have ostensibly resisted the advances of the rapist has often been used in legal trials in India in order to provide impunity to the rapist.

Similarly, the 2012 gang rape case of Jyoti Pandey/Nirbhaya, which caused a furor in Indian and international media and widespread social protests, resulted in an amendment of the procedure by which rape trials are processed under Indian law. The result was a patriarchal anxiety over certain legal changes deemed feminist. In addition, the onslaught of #MeToo in India also brought with it, almost a decade later to the Shiney Ahuja case, rape accusations against several high-profile actors and celebrities in Bollywood adding to the patriarchal anxiety that *any man* could be accused of rape.

However, if caste concerns remained by and large absent from the 2009 Shiney Ahuja case as well as Jyoti Pandey's 2012 gang rape issue, the 2014 Badaun gang rape case brought caste hegemony and caste oppression as an undeniable facet of rape culture to the forefront. Two Dalit girls were found hanging on a tree and honor killing was alleged. While the initial post mortem report confirmed rape and strangulation from hanging, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) denied rape and dismissed the initial report as flawed. The multiple statements and review reports have led to the common belief that the truth of brutal gang rape was covered up by the investigating agencies. This event was widely reported in the press and gained national and international

notoriety. Similarly, in 2016, a Dalit family was publicly flogged on the pretext of cow protection in Una, Gujarat. The video of the incident circulated on social media and caused widespread social protests and is notorious as an illustration of caste violence. Forty-three people, including members of the police force, were arrested in connection with the case and it has been under trial since 2018. Along with the Una floggings, the Badaun rape case forms the backdrop of the caste politics and narrative of *Article 15*.

In each of these real-life incidents and their projection on screen, a certain veridical relationship of cinematic representation to truth is assumed. Further, traditional cinematic consumption through packed theatres and hero worship of the male lead, a tradition which has been called “fan Bhakti” (Prasad 68) is common in the mainstream film industry and beyond, leading to a dangerous trend of celebrity impunity. The ubiquity of rape culture, and its aesthetic representation in film as veridical discourse, leads to a problematic understanding of circulating myths as truth. Moreover, the spectacle associated with Bollywood film production is concomitant with the spectacle associated with rape trials. This is a Bollywood tradition as well that reaches as far back as the film *Damini*.

Through this article, I will argue that the relationship between rape culture and narrative cinema, and between caste oppression and its expression as community sexual violence, underlies the biopolitical machinery of the state. Postcolonial biopolitics and the Foucauldian power of the spectacle over “the body of the condemned” - a facet Michel Foucault associated with sovereign power and sovereignty - has returned to state polity (*Discipline and Punish* 3). Bio-sovereign power is operative in a myriad of ways. This spectacular biopower uses the rape spectacle and its cinematic dispersion as a mode of perpetuating rape culture and Savarna patriarchy.

In what follows, I show how an aspect of popular culture, the mainstream Hindi film industry, is used by the biopolitical postcolony to harness affective- and emotionally cathartic modes of regulation of its governable public. The production of scopic regimes of cathartic pleasure are embedded in Brahminical patriarchal discourse to allow for a seeming rationalization of the justice-dispensing benign biopolitical state. Representation of the discourse around rape in this cinematic regime is imbued with a triple signification: it acts as narrative trope, a mode of displacement to allow for the narrative of care by the biopolitical state to emerge, and as logic which seeks to justify the continuation of Brahminical patriarchy. Further, visual pleasure within the narrative cinema of Bollywood does not silence its women performers. Rather, they are allowed by Bollywood to project their own voice and agency onto and in favor of the continuation of the biopolitical agenda of the state. At the heart of this governmentalized logic of the biopolitical state lies the substitution of the dangerous individual(s): it is no longer the person accused of rape but rather the figure of the Dalit and the raped woman who are created as those ungovernable entities who must be tamed. It is this logic which replaces artistic representation for legal representation in a display of narrative verisimilitude.

I. Biopolitics as Spectacle

Biopolitics has been discussed on multiple occasions with respect to the onslaught of Western modernity (Foucault, Agamben, Hardt and Negri). Biopolitics, according to Foucault, is the means whereby what was the sovereign power of the right to kill was displaced by the biopolitical aspect of the governmentalized state - the right to make live and let die which worked both on the individuated human body as well as the species-of-the-human-being category of the population. There are links to the workings of biopolitics in the colony, within Foucault’s own work as well as continuations and critiques of it (Inda, Stoler, Heath and Legg, Subramaniam). The postcolony too has been seen as marked by governmentality, biopolitics and sovereign power (Bhattacharya, Hansen and Stepputat, Mbembe). The relation between disciplinary power and the spectacular power of the sovereign is seen as continuous with the biopolitical (Bhattacharya). A thread connecting the scopic regime of the panoptic gaze, the actuarial gaze and biopolitics has also

been established (Feldman) owing to the biopolitically-oriented welfare state. We have moved from surveillance states governed by the panopticon (Foucault) to societies of control (Deleuze) to thinking about the regime of the visible (Rancière). The notion that feminist concerns about the body and reproductive health are actually also biopolitical concerns about the molar and molecular planes of biopower has also already been examined. This view looks at feminism as biopolitics: for instance, how women's concerns over the body and their reproductive health - the population - are a form of biopolitics (Murphy, Repo).

Yet, the argument of the postcolonial biopolitical spectacle has not been discussed with reference to feminist concerns about sexual violence. It is my wish to develop this link through the following contention: first, *that in the postcolony, biopolitics acts through its spectacular power, its power in and as spectacle, to create docile bodies who are recipients of care*. Second, and relatedly, *biopolitics accomplishes this spectacular power through a juridical-governmental discursive regime of the rape spectacle to harness the spectacle for its own ends*.

The first trajectory narrates the story of Bollywood, or the mainstream Hindi film industry, having currency as 'the culture industry' (Horkheimer and Adorno) and being an ideological apparatus. The quintessential Bollywood film becomes the space where the wish-fulfilling fantasies and phobias of the public sphere are played out. The Bollywood film becomes an ideological realm that both influences and is influenced by mainstream culture. It is informed by a regime of the visible (Rancière), a visual regime of all that can be seen and heard, and utterances made possible in discourse, which create the docile vision of the spectators. I call this phenomena biopolitical Bollywood: the space where collective fantasy is projected in order to create docile citizen-subjects and ideological fears and wishes about the cultural realm are enacted. I will illustrate the point about Bollywood as collective psychological fantasy of cultural fears and aspirations in a close reading of *Section 375* and *Article 15*. These recent films showcase Bollywood's fascination with the juridico-sovereign domain of the law. This juridico-political domain is what Foucault and Foucauldians that followed (Agamben, in particular) conceive as concomitant with biopolitics. The additional aspect of the spectacle is associated with sovereign power in Foucault. Biopolitical Bollywood thus becomes a space where the spectacle associated with bio-sovereign power unfurls. The end of this spectacular display of state sovereignty is to create docile bodies who are recipients of state care.

The second trajectory is the much-discussed spectacularity of the rape trial, the pornographic impulse of its display of juridico-sovereign power over the raped body. This public trial is harnessed by the juridico-political biopolitical state to simultaneously propagate rituals of power over the body of the rape victim, the perpetrator of sexual violence, as well as the public imagination (Horeck, Kumar, Menon, Mackinnon). For instance, in reading rape as a crime and not a civil dispute, Indian jurisprudence substitutes the notion of justice of the raped subject's body on another domain. By saying rape is a crime not a civil offence, it creates the notion of justice for that crime onto the body politic of the state. Rape is seen not as a violation of the raped subject's body but rather as a crime, a trespass against the functioning of the state. Its dispensation of justice is not on to the justice of the raped subject but rather on the state as a juridically-functioning body. This leads to the notion that the state owns ultimate control over its governable subjects: both the rapacious body as well as the rapist. This biopolitical-juridical hold of the postcolonial state on the rape victim as well as the rapist is evident by several rape cases in the public popular imagination, some of which were discussed earlier. Another example is the case of Aruna Shanbaug (Gursahani). The juridical decision to not grant the raped and suffering, brain-dead body of Aruna Shanbaug euthanasia is rooted in a biopolitical tendency of the Indian postcolonial state to preserve life (even in vegetative form) and thus maintain a hold onto the life itself of the subjects under its domain. Another example is the case of Jyoti Singh Pandey's brutal gang rape. The recent enactment of capital punishment for the rapists and the discursive production of the unwavering right of the state on the life of those convicted of rape points to the biopolitically sovereign decision 'to take life or let live' that Foucault highlighted (*Society Must Be Defended, History of Sexuality Vol. 1*)

However, the popularity of each of these cases in the nation's consciousness is not limited to discussions in the news media, nor do they inform the fabric of civil society and 'political society' (Chatterjee 38) alone. The influence of these cases is also prevalent in the artistic landscape of Bollywood which lends itself to the state's biopolitical hold.

II. Narrative Cinema as Rape Spectacle in *Section 375*

Rape and rape culture are a prominent part of Bollywood films as studies on Bollywood of the 1980s and beyond have examined (Gopalan, Karki, Manohar and Kline). The filmic representation of rape in Bollywood highlights what has been called the "public fantasies of rape designed for cultural consumption" (Horeck 7). I venture to examine the play of desire and projection of fears, wishes, fantasies on the filmic text. This exploration is undertaken to point that the spate of recent cases of sexual violence and the proliferation of rape culture has reached the domain of cinematic representation. Social anxieties about wavering patriarchy are played out on camera and posit a veridical relationship of film to reality. This rape culture on film, the interplay of its projection of social fears and fantasies, leads to a biopolitical creation of a docile spectatorship governed by the cinematic regime of the visible.

The regime of the visible created by *Section 375*, for instance, intends to create a docile spectator who consumes and incorporates the biopolitical state's anxiety and fear into their individual psyche. The use of recent public events in the news as backdrop for the film's narrative confers on to the film a quality of verisimilitude even as the narrative retains the truth of its denouement from the public. *Section 375* is a detective story masquerading as courtroom drama. Anjali Dangle (Meera Chopra) returns home from the house of her employer Rohan Khurana (Rahul Bhatt), a celebrated film director, and reports a case of rape with the police subsequently. An FIR is lodged and an investigation of rape begins in court with the minutest of details of the event made visible. At the heart of the tale is not a whodunnit but the very basic question that the film's tagline *marzi ya zabardasti* (will or coercion) suggests: the narrative kernel is a question of whether the woman consented to sex with the accused or was forced 'without her consent' and 'against her will' (Section 375, Indian Penal Code).

The hyperrealistic sets, stellar performances which stay true to character, and an aura of mystery created around this basic question of consent point to an ethos that wishes to say that the truth will out. This ethos of the truth will out is the result of an aesthetic that creates reality effects. The gaze of the camera is a gaze of verisimilitude. The profilmic text seeks to erase itself as representation. The audience is made to forget that what is presented is a fictional depiction of reality. The public events that the film gestures toward as backdrop - the #MeToo movement, Shiney Ahuja's case, Nirbhaya's case - create these reality effects.

The film unquestioningly appropriates the manner of creation of "visual pleasure" in spectatorship within cinema (Mulvey 393). The cinematic regime creates "the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking" (Mulvey 394). Split along a gendered binary, the line of pleasure objectifies and displays the woman as passive victim (Dangle) even as it creates a gaze that identifies with the male protagonist.

The film's protagonist - the one where the audiences' line of identification lies - is not the accused rapist but his lawyer. The film, in its eradication of its representativeness, seeks that the audience gaze - aligned with the gaze of the camera - identify with Tarun Saluja (Akshaye Khanna). For instance, in the opening scenes, when Saluja addresses a lecture to an audience of law students in the film's narrative, the audience of the law school and the audience of the theatre are shown as the same. Later references and representation are replete with his philanthropy (he only takes high profile cases like Khurana's to fuel his pro bono work). His lecture to students in the opening scene about the idea of law and justice and benign mentorship point to the idea of state machinery (such as the law) with a human face. Saluja is a mentor even to Public Prosecutor Hiral Gandhi (Richa Chaddha) and this persona of the benign patriarch remains until the last scene where the two

opposing lawyers and their families have dinner together. But most of all, the profilmic text creates a pathos of familiarity for Saluja: the familiar and the familial are used to create sympathy in the audience. Saluja is portrayed as the average good citizen who loves his family, his wife and daughter and mentors several women in the narrative. He is ready to defend even an accused rapist because in a just judicial process the defendant must have adequate legal representation, even in a case of rape. However, once it is established in the film that Dangle is lying, and that the rape accusation is the result of a courtship and affair gone sour, the patriarchal/masculinist impulse is to posit the film as a cautionary tale - the misogynist suspicion that women lie about sexual violence is used to erase and make obscure the event of sexual violence. The figure of 'the avenging woman', (Gopalan 97) – an already commented upon Bollywood trope – becomes motif in the biopolitical apparatus on the screen.

The film encourages its audience - already identifying with the defense - to elide any possibility of rape such that by the end of the film, the *pathos of familiarity* extends to Khurana as well. His wife leaves him, he has been sentenced to rigorous life imprisonment and has had his public image tarred. The patriarchal logic of the film begins with a case of rape and ends with a control over the structuring of spectatorship. The audience is encouraged to feel sympathy for the accused rapist and 'fear' for what happened to him.

The women, at the end, too bow to the patriarch: instead of being silenced, the women characters - Gandhi and Dangle - both identify with the denouement as proclaimed by Saluja in the courtroom. Dangle identifies with Saluja's pronouncement that she lied about the rape and falsely accused Khurana. This is enacted in private after the court has pronounced its judgment, in a confidential confession to the prosecutor, Gandhi. This is Foucauldian pastoral power come to roost with the juridical apparatus proclaiming power over its biopolitical subject. Its judgment is in Dangle's name, on her behalf, for her apparent good. Gandhi too in the ultimate scene confides in the benevolent patriarch that he was right, that justice was not served though the law was upheld. The notion that the bureaucracy of the courtrooms are about the law and not justice, a recurrent theme in the film, is used the moment that feminist law is applied to persecute rape cases. The apparently unjust law is one that demands that rape is what the victim says it is, the word of the victim is enough. The words of the prosecutor, in dialogues written by and credited to Gaurav Solanki and Anubhav Sinha, mouth stereotypes of the feminist movement. For instance, public prosecutor Gandhi's shouts of "objection milord!" is reduced to the status of a recurring trope, one that invokes laughter. The film suggests that it "revels in giving out the illusion of moral ambiguity when it really is deeply distrustful of women" (Das np).

The outcry about a famous celebrity accused of rape in the film resonates with the public nature of several incidents after the 2012 Delhi gang rape and the 2009 Shiney Ahuja case. While the narrative is positioned to resemble Ahuja's story, the legal ramifications of rape are those used after the 2013 amendments to the law. Yet these injunctions, the public outcry about men getting away with rape, are sought to be diminutively presented through the suggestion that the outrage is solely a social media trend. Trending hashtags such as #hangtherapist in the film point to two functions they perform. First, they are used to display feminist outrage in the public sphere about issues like rape. Second, the momentous force gathered by such politically charged speech is diffused by Saluja - the 'hero' - who diminutively refers to the outrage as "in the courtroom of Twitter." This politically charged speech act of the crowd is turned into the aftermath awaiting Khurana who is later revealed to be innocent. This is done to present death as the consequence and fate of the accused in order to arouse *fear*. The hashtags transform into injustice done by a woman scorned, in a misogynist representation of sexual violence. They are used to present misogyny in a biopolitically sanitized courtroom drama. The possibility that the biopolitical hold over a life of a person is made possible only in the context (in the logic of this film) that he had extra-marital sex with a woman who later twisted the story and cried foul is presented.

Rape in this film is used triply. First, rape is the narrative trope which propels the story. It is the generator of the plot, the narrative *tour de force* and the main mystery created. The actual sexual

violence on women is elided by the possibility that women lie. Rape becomes an absent presence, as feminist readings of masculinist texts which represent rape have discovered (Higgins and Silver 3). Rape is also eroticized (Alcoff and Gray 262) - as not rape but as sex after all in the misogynist logic of the filmic narrative - and thereby naturalized through the film. Second, the gains made by the 2013 amendments to the rape laws after feminist and popular outcry shows a displacement: the alleged crime on the body of the woman is sought to be the entry point for the biopolitical state to deliberate on the fate - not just of the one accused of rape but also of the woman raped, on whose behalf the court seeks to dispense justice. Third, the discourse of sexual violence in the film's misogyny allows for a logic to unravel whereby patriarchal control over the angry feminist crowd must be biopolitically managed. The Foucauldian dangerous individual in such misogynist logic is not the one who has been accused of rape who has a review to look forward to, it is rather the figure of the avenging woman. If the crowd's outcry against rape seems to highlight a moment of extra-judicial sovereign power, the male judge overlooking the crowd in his chamber in the film before he pronounces his judgment is a depiction of the biopolitical state machinery's holding and appropriating the crowd for its own ends. The crowd in the film, protesting on the streets in outrage, seems to stand for sovereign power, as has been suggested about crowds in protest in the South Asian postcolony (Hansen and Stepputat 183). However, the textual moment this crowd seems to overpower the functioning of the judicial process is the moment that the demands of the crowd are appropriated by the male judge into his judgment of 20 years rigorous life imprisonment.

This filmic text seems to point to a case of "public penology" - the "public text of postcolonial biopolitics" - which exists by interrogating the triad of exceptional crime and its narration, "disjunctive justice that conducts legal codes in displacement" and its "public performance" (Bhattacharya 20). It is a justice-oriented biopolitical spectacle of crime managed by the postcolonial state machinery. In other words, through public penology, the bio-sovereign power of the postcolonial state uses rape and homicide as alibi to enact and assemble its own limits. Public penology is not just the simulation of events, it is also a public spectacle of the power of the postcolonial biopolitical state on the Foucauldian body of the condemned - the accused rapist.

Several aspects of public penology appear to be of interest for the postcolony after the 2012 Delhi gang rape as well as the subsequent 2013 legal amendments to the Indian Penal Code. First, for Bhattacharya, public penology acts as a *point of entry* for the postcolonial biopolitical state to engage with the "ungovernable" outcast, the dangerous individual, and define its own power by condemning them to death (15). Second, the ritual is enacted *en masse*, its very public-ness lends itself to a spectacular display of sovereign power (9). Third, the public ritual "is enacted through local *habits, prejudices, and feelings*" (20). The film and its filmic representation of the law, however, seems to suggest a modified version of these arguments. Rape, in the film, is used to point to an ungovernable subject who needs to be tamed: the avenging woman figure in the film. The public-ness of the private ritual is used by sovereign power: the bringing in to the public sphere the nature of a private act is what threatens to unjustly shake the balance of patriarchy. This is the true transgression that Dangle performs in the narrative. It is a transgression that evokes horror in the Saluja-identifying spectators. Further, local habits, prejudices, and feelings are precisely used as points of entry to enact a cautionary tale about the sexually transgressive woman and the dangers she poses to the just functioning of society. The patriarchal anxiety generated by feminism and the transgressive woman is sought to be used as the driving emotional plot device.

In the end, the film evokes horror in the intended audience. While it would be convenient to define this audience as comprising predominantly of men, the positive reviews of this film by women critics, point to an altogether different and disturbingly patriarchal picture (Jhunjunwala, Kukreja, Radhakrishnan). Fear becomes the dominant emotion which is biopolitically harnessed by the politics and poetics of the film. It creates a regime of the visible and becomes a way for the actual biopolitical postcolonial state to manage the affective irregularities of an outraged crowd. The scopic regime created by the film allows for the biopolitical postcolony to control the domain of the visible, the sayable and the doable.

III. Politics and Pity in *Article 15*

If *Section 375* is about *fear*, the cathartic spectacle in *Article 15* is harnessed to allow for the production of *pity*. The filmic text structures affect production in a way such that the dominant emotion the intended spectator is supposed to feel is pity. Unlike sympathy or empathy, the politics of pity demonstrate that the pathos created is one of unfamiliarity resulting in a pathos of condescension. This condescension is used to cement further the divide between Savarna and Dalit, the urban audience and the rural subject of the film. The only way in which the conversation about caste marginalization can be taken up in the mainstream is if a Savarna director and the resulting Brahmin hero of his political unconscious decides to do something about caste inequalities. As a reviewer claims, we (the audience) follow the foreign gaze of the male protagonist Assistant Commissioner, IPS officer Ayan Ranjan (Ayushman Khurana) and are asked to identify with him (Banerjee). The Brahmin hero speaks for the voiceless Dalit women in the film who have been raped.

The film's narrative creates another whodunnit involving rape once again. Who raped the three Dalit girls who have gone missing from the village of Lalgaoon? Who is responsible for the death of two and where is the missing third girl? This mystery is not played out in the courtroom but in the office of the Assistant Commissioner. The film's depiction of sexual violence against the three girls is presented mostly in absentia; this absence is what propels the mystery in the plot. The death of the first two is presented as a pornographic display of Dalit women's suffering. Their deaths are (wrongly) used to create mystery with the aspersion that there were same sex relations which led to honor killing within the Dalit community. The hanged girls present a spectacle of power over the body. The missing third girl is the trope which propels the plot - what happened after they were gang raped in a bus? Like *Section 375*, the plot device acts as a narrative trope. It further functions as a biopolitical point of entry - the state, represented by Ranjan - is required to work on behalf of the missing girl to mobilize state machinery that uses the pretext of the missing girl to establish and consolidate its power despite references to corruption in the film. Furthermore, the film also seeks to tame the Dalit figures as it sets out to speak on behalf of them.

The process by which the Dalit women are spoken about, spoken for and pitied is enacted through a romanticization of the hero figure in the film. Ranjan is the wide-eyed "modern Mountbatten", alluding to his Western influences. Other techniques include a juxtaposition of the rustic song "Kahab Toh" by Sayani Gupta with Bob Dylan music (and its implications as a Western import) that Ranjan listens to, which endeavors to highlight a disconnect in the vision of Savarna good intentions and its cluelessness in the face of the grim realities of the village. Ranjan's ignorance of local Dalit traditions, customs and ways of living show him as the bourgeois figure that Thomas Macaulay had predicted during the British empire: an Indian body with a British mind. He is someone with a Western upbringing and a St. Stephen's education. His travels in Europe lead to a radical disconnect between him and the realities of rural North India. His ignorance of local culture is romanticized and presented as the good intentions that caste inequality go away, as if they were a matter of attitude and not structural and systemic social inequality.

Ranjan romanticizes and Americanizes the rural landscape as the "wild, wild West" because he lacks familiarity with any other form of knowledge of his country of origin. This romanticizing is further explored through the trope of the topos. The topoi associated with Ranjan are closed spaces such as the interior space of the police car, where he is gazing out at the countryside. The disconnect is shown visually in scenes where the cool AC of the car and the harsh and hot visceral realities of the village are juxtaposed. Further, Ranjan's treatment of Amali, his cook, as 'beta' is just one instance of Ranjan's benevolence. He is the benevolent patriarch once again who the intended urban Indian audience are made to identify with despite, or because of, the romanticization.

Other characters are divided into Savarna men, such as CBI Officer Panniker, Inspector Brahmdutt, Satyendra Rai, and so on, who are corrupt, privileged, or ineffective in producing progressive social change. The Dalit character who does seek to bring about progressive change is Nishad. However, he needs to be presented as the radical alternative which does not work. As the filmic narrative progresses, Nishad's vision of Dalit politics is presented in a bleaker light. The patronage he receives within the political system is shown not to work. He has gone underground because of legal action pending upon him. He also articulates the feeling of never having five minutes of peace. Finally, his radical politics is sought to be tamed by the statist machinery, even as he himself aligns his sympathy finally with Ranjan's mission of finding the missing third girl, Nishad's beloved Gaura's sister, by promising that the men on strike would resume work for Ranjan.

Other Dalit men are shown as corrupt politicians or complicit with rape because the system has appropriated them. The former is, for instance, depicted through the upcoming elections, where the rape becomes an important electoral point of discussion, feeding in to caste prejudices and caste-based voting. The latter is highlighted in the denouement by Amali's brother, Nihal Singh, and his confession to Ranjan. Singh reveals how he, along with several other policemen, was a participant in the gang rape. This typology of the complicit and corrupt Dalit man is used as a juxtaposition tool to show Ranjan in a good light. This juxtaposition is similar to a metaphor used in the beginning of the film: when Rama returned to Ayodhya in *The Ramayana*, Lalgona was in darkness as opposed to the lamps lit by surrounding villages to celebrate. Lalgona's darkness permits Rama's palace to shine even brighter in contrast. Local variations to national Hindu religious narratives are used to perpetuate caste while simultaneously allowing for a depiction of its Brahmin hero in benign terms.

The film's voice of conscience, Aditi, Ranjan's love interest, is a presumably privileged Savarna woman who is put on a pedestal. Both Gaura - who dares to speak out of turn to Ranjan about her missing sister and Dr. Malti Ram, the assistant doctor in charge of the girls' postmortem report, are shown as heroic but ultimately rely on Ranjan's power. They too are used as tools to highlight the "goodness" of Ranjan's cause and his noble intentions. Like *Section 375*, these women identify with Ranjan. They are not objectified but bow down to the figure of the benevolent patriarch.

While Ranjan is busy solving the case and while the audience aligns its gaze with that of Ranjan, certain elements are consented and normalized through the backdoor. Ranjan's use of phone taps and phone records points to a normalization of the securitized state machinery put to use for apparent social good. The use of progressive narratives about caste which have recently surfaced in the media become the backdrop for the apparently socially progressive tone of the film. However, in its spotlight on bringing "the conversation around caste" into the mainstream, the film enacts what has been termed the "Brahmin saviour complex" (Attri): the notion of Savarna supremacy in the light of the plight of the pitiable Dalit. The Dalit, especially the Dalit woman, by virtue of being represented as not being able to speak, is rendered mute and in need of saving. This leads to further cementing the power hierarchy even as it brings caste into a seemingly progressive frame.

In letting Ranjan be the romanticized hero, the filmic text reflects pity as the pathos that the film needs to regulate. The affective regulation within the scopic regime of the film is visibly pointed to through Inspector Brahmdutt's assertion to Dr. Malti Ram. Brahmdutt asserts that Ram's insistence on gang rape in the post mortem report is a result of too much emotion and that writing a poem on Facebook would help. The filmic text aspires to create pity as the emotionally cathartic moment because pity because, unlike sympathy or empathy, is condescending. The Dalit woman who is raped is the girl-child who needs to be saved by a hero. The profilmic narrative points to a notion that ultimately the truth will out, that ultimately the missing third girl, Gaura's sister, would be found by Ranjan and that the corrupt policemen (be it CBI officer Panikker who threatens to melodramatically derail the investigation or be it the policemen participating in the gang rape)

would be punished. The satisfaction at the mystery reveal and the firm ending of saving the third Dalit girl points to a cathartic spectacle that ultimately leads to the acceptance of the status quo. Justice is served by the heroic valor of its Brahmin hero. The status quo politics of the film are best encapsulated by Inspector Brahmdutt's assertion in the middle of the film that it is necessary to maintain social equilibrium ("Santulan banaye rakhein"). The scopic regime of the cinematic text is shown as leading to a perpetuation of Brahminical patriarchy, one which allows and creates the condition of possibility for the justice-dispensing benign biopolitical state to emerge. Jacques Rancière calls this the regime of the visible: an aesthetic creation of the sayable and the doable as political possibilities (*The Politics of Aesthetics*). This regime creates discursive instances that regulate and manage viewers emotions towards a biopolitical logic of the goodness of state machinery.

IV. Conclusion

I have argued how catharsis as a mode of regulation posits fear and pity as affective states in *Section 375* and *Article 15*. These are states which regulate and manage emotions into cathartic resolutions even as they point to what have been labelled 'rape myths' (Bourke 24). Rape myths are those everyday commonsensical (misogynist) notions which attain the status of mythologized veracities in rape culture (24). This article shows how rape is mythologized in rape culture as the cathartic spectacle of the biopolitical state. Mainstream Hindi narrative cinema, or Bollywood, enables the representation of the biopolitical as a scopic regime. The visual element of biopolitics in sexual violence is evident from the various references to 'public rape' (Horeck 1), the spectacle of the rape trial, the pornographic imagination that the law manufactures, the notion of public penology, and the biopolitical hold of the state on the rapist. All of these aspects point to the biopolitical as a scopic regime, one to which Bollywood particularly conducive. The spectacle thus attains the status of the link amongst narrative cinema, sexual violence, and public penology. The spectacle is the presence while actual materiality of sexual violence on the body of the woman is conspicuous only in absence. Rape becomes an absent present: the reality of sexual violence is erased from the filmic texts through sanitizing rape as narrative trope. However, the violence becomes the origin and the basis of Savarna male (homo)social relations and the operating structure of Savarna patriarchy.

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